



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

July 22, 2002

H.R. 4620 **America's Wilderness Protection Act**

As ordered reported by the House Committee on Resources on July 10, 2002

H.R. 4620 would establish a 10-year deadline for completing wilderness studies on federal lands and would authorize the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture to release wilderness study areas (WSAs) from that status. CBO estimates that enacting this bill would have no significant impact on the federal budget over the next 10 years. H.R. 4620 could affect direct spending (including offsetting receipts); therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures would apply, but CBO expects that any such effects would not exceed \$500,000 in any of the next several years. H.R. 4620 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

The Wilderness Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act authorize the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to establish WSAs on federal lands and to study those areas for potential designation as wilderness. Once a WSA is established by either Secretary, legislation is required to change the classification of the study area to either a wilderness or nonwilderness area. Until legislation is enacted to make that determination, the WSA is essentially managed as wilderness and remains closed to new income-generating activities. Currently, more than 50 million acres of federal lands are included in more than 600 WSAs. According to the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Forest Service, most of those WSAs were established well over 10 years ago and probably will remain in that status for at least 10 more years.

H.R. 4620 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to allow nonwilderness uses on WSAs by releasing them from WSA status. In addition, under H.R. 4620, those existing WSAs that are not released from that status by the secretaries would be automatically released 10 years after enactment. Finally, under the bill, any new WSAs could be studied for a maximum of 10 years before being released from that status.

Releasing lands within WSAs to nonwilderness uses could open them to new income-generating activities, particularly new mineral leasing and development, that otherwise would

be prohibited under current law. According to DOI and the Forest Service, however, federal lands with the highest leasing potential generally lie outside of WSAs. Thus, we expect that any increase in offsetting receipts from mineral leasing and development under H.R. 4620 would be negligible relative to the amounts generated from such activities on all federal onshore lands, which we estimate will total about \$1.2 billion in 2002. Any increase in offsetting receipts would be partially offset by a corresponding increase in direct spending for payments to share those receipts with local jurisdictions. Hence, we estimate that the net impact on direct spending under H.R. 4620 would not exceed \$500,000 in any of the next several years.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Megan Carroll. This estimate was approved by Robert A. Sunshine, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.